(captioner standing by). >> >> Hi, everyone, welcome. We're just going to give it a little bit for people to filter in. And we'll get started shortly. Stshes we've got a lot to get through today so we'll get started. I'm the communications and training manager here at the Massachusetts Office on Disabiity. Welcome to our quarterly t tea. The chat has been turned off for attendees, but I will share links and resources there. You can ask a question at any time. To ask your question, please click on the Q & A button in your menu, or click Raise Hand in reactions menu and we will turn on your video and microphone. ASL interpretation is being provided. You should see the ASL interpreter on your screen. To make that video appear larger or smaller, click and drag the line between the slides and the interpreter's video. We are also providing CART for today's webinar. Please click the CC menu in your button to view captions or you can visit the link that I will put in the chat to view those captions. I will click record and we can get started. I hand it over to Naomi Goldberg. >> NAOMI: Hello, everyone. Thanks for joining us today for Massachusetts Office on Disabiity's quarterly tea. We always like to begin our presentations by offering a little bit of an explanation about what Massachusetts Office on Disabiity does, and by the way, going forward, I'm going to be using the acronym MOD to refer to Massachusetts Office on Disabiity. So we have two slides here. Sorry about that! We have two slides here. My slides are not advancing. Yes, they are [laughing]. One is brief statement about what we do, and second is a list of our duties and functions, which I hope you will read yourself on your own time; but we don't have a lot of time so I'm just going to highlight the one detail that I think would be relevant to today's discussion, and that is our function of providing information and technical guidance on disability rights, related, civil -- on disability-related civil rights matters and architectural access issues. People can contact us for information and guidance around how disability-related laws apply to situations, how to properly request reasonable accommodation and to consult about different strategies one can use to resolve their issues. So we can move on now. For the reason that we're here today, and at MOD we're very aware of how difficult it is for people to figure out who and where to contact when they have a question, when they need to find a resource to assist them or try to resolve a problem they're having with a third party. And we know how challenging it is, and that's why we put together this presentation. So today, we're going to be discussing ways to make things easier when you're trying to figure eut which agencies or organizations are appropriate to connect with, to answer your questions, to resolve your problems, and how to interact with them. So we will be talking about some of the common pitfalls to avoid when you're doing this. We want to make you understand how important preparing to have these conversations, how important that is, and how we can help make things easier. We also want to provide an explanation of the general landscape of organizations, and how to communicate effectively with them. And overall, to find a way to resolve your issue as quickly as possible. What we want to do is avoid having multiple conversations with multiple places, and not getting anywhere over it. We know it causes a lot of frustration, and a lot of times these issues are painful, personal, and the faster we can fix them, the better. But before we get started, I just wanted to point out that for the purposes of this presentation, when we discuss people needing help -- excuse me -- we're going to be referencing two different categories of help. One would be a situation which someone wants to connect with a service, a resource or a benefit. The other is about a personal trying to resolve a problem or a person has an issue with a third party. We'll eventually get to sharing our recommend aigdz for handling issues but we will start talking about common pitfalls to avoid when trying to connect with agencies and organizations to either find resources or try to get help resolving a problem. So, first not every issue is disability-related. It's really common for people with disabilities who need to resource or have a problem to immediately start by reaching out to all the agencies they know of that have a disability focus. And from there, maybe the way in which they explain their need or issue is really focused on the fact that they have a disability. And this isn't gonna be productive or efficient strategy if you're not dealing with a disability-related matter. So what does "disability-related" mean? It means when talking about someone needing a resource, a disability-related resource is something that is just for people with disabilities as opposed to a service that is not exclusively for people with disabilities, but people with disabilities might use. For example, there are lots of benefits for people who have low income and those benefits aren't just for people with disabilities, but some people with disabilities might use them. When talking about a problem or a disability, someone is facing a barrier, a disability-related issue would be when someone is treated differently because they have a disability, or there's some kind of disability-related barrier that's preventing a person from participating equally from doing their job, from enjoying their housing. That sort of thing. So the take-away here is that contacting a disability-related agency isn't warranted for every issue, and going into specifics about someone's disability isn't really applicable when an issue or a question isn't disability-related. We'll talk a lot more about that. Okay. So when people are looking for assistance, they often call around to a lot of different agencies. Anyone they can think of. And kind of make assumptions based on the name of an organization, or based on some other organization telling you that someone does something, and then you call those places and get frustrated because that agency can't help. The reality is that agencies, every agency, has a specific role, and most agencies aren't connected to one another. I think a lot of people think that government is one place, when really government is made up of multiple agencies, that don't know what the other agencies are doing. So when you don't contact the right place or an agency doesn't have expertise in a particular subject area, they aren't going to be able to answer a question. So it is really helpful to know that every organization and agency has a very different and specific role. Okay, next. So when people are trying to resolve an issue, they've probably already taken a lot of steps themselves to try and address it before they start looking for help from others. So it really would be a waste of time if you contact someone who's going to tell you something that you already know, something that you've already done. And also, different agencies may be the right place depending on what stage in a process you're in. So it's all very complicated. I'm sorry about that. So the best approach really to resolving any issue is going to be able to understand where you're at and be able to explain that to someone else. Next. Not every issue warrants a complaint. You have legal rights in a lot of different situations. But in fact, many issues that people have can be resolved more quickly and with much less effort when you go through an informal process. And we're gonna get to this a lot more later as we move forward. Next reasonable accommodation. Utilizing reasonable accommodation process is a really important avenue for ensuring that someone has equal access -- that a person with a disability has equal access to services and programs and to the community, but reasonable accommodation -- excuse me, I'm getting over a cold -- is only an avenue for disability-related barriers. Sometimes people use reasonable accommodation in appropriately. For example, if your landlord were to turn off your heat, you wouldn't ask them to turn it on as a reasonable accommodation because you have a disability. The heat should be turned on, because a person is a tenant and they have a right to heat. So while this is an important issue, it's not a disability-related issue. For that reason, reasonable accommodation doesn't apply in this situation at all. Okay. Finally, a lot of times people contact MOD and request a lawyer or advocate. We find in a lot of cases a person can really make progress, the best progress, by connecting with either a subject matter expert or an oversight agency. So it's really much more productive when you're calling around to places to not immediately start with "I'm requesting a lawyer." You may really know that you need one, but in a lot of cases that probably isn't the way to start. It's probably more productive to, instead, simply say what the issue is and ask about how an agency can potential assist. Now we're going to get into some steps, which is the core of this presentation. I think we probably already know, that's why we're here, that there isn't one place that's assigned to answer every question that a person with a disability has. There isn't one place that connects you to everything, everything service, every potential service for which you might be eligible, and there isn't a place that has enough expertise in every subject that a person might encounter that they can sufficiently answer you and provide good information. So you have to shop around to different places, and that's why we're here. So we will be proposing a series of steps that you can take that will, hopefully, make it easier to navigate these situations in which you need information from a third party. And taking these steps is really about thinking through your needs and your issues in a logical way ahead of time, and then you're in a better position to find the right match to get assistance. SoE we're going to start with identifying the issue, a really important step. If we need help, we want to be able to concisely explain our needs when talking to a third party and not provide irrelevant information. When you identify your issue properly, you're helped in getting organized. It helps you organize better who to contact or at least to eliminate certain choices and it allows you to suf irently explain your issue to someone else if you've thought about what your issue is. So how do you properly identify the issue? And we are suggesting you ask yourself three questions to help you identify your issue. We're gonna address each one separately. The first one is: Is there a need for a service or resource, or are you facing a problem? Which one is it? We're asking you to think about: What is the context of the issue? And finally, is it a disability-related matter? Again, all to help you figure out where to go and what to do. So on this slide, we're giving some examples of the differences between services and resources. When you're trying to locate a program, a service, a benefit or some resources to meet your need, it sort of looks like this. A person needs a contractor to build a ramp, a housekeeping and meal prep service, orientation and mobility training, assistance finding a job. Those are examples of services and issues. The other -- rather, services, resources, benefits. The other example is a person encounters a particular barrier, or they're having a problem, or someone isn't following a law, policy or regulation. Some examples of that could include a landlord saying they're not going to provide an accommodation, getting an eviction notice, a town denying some kind of service. B) what we talked about before, what is the context of this issue? Here we have a list of contexts, some basic subject matter, basic subjects that are the issue. It's a broad list, certainly not exhaustive. There could be many issues. But you can note that none of them say "disability." The question one is asking themselves to identify the context is: What is the subject of the problem that I'm having? Now, we're back to the question of whether or not something is disability-related. You're asking yourself this, because you're thinking about whether you need to be in touch ultimately with an agency that has a disability-related focus, or are you trying to just reach, find a resource that everyone uses, a member of the general public uses when they have the same questions or problems? If we're talking about a service you need, just to give examples of what would be a disability-related service versus a not-disability-related service, a personal care attendant is an example of some people with disabilities might use. For those of you who don't know what a personal care attendant is, they help people with disabilities who need hands-on assistance with daily living tasks. Now, a person who needs affordable housing, whether or not they have a disability, the kneed is to find affordable housing, and that's not disability-related. It's something that anyone who has low income needs. Now, I want to point out that I recognize that it's difficult and people struggle with trying to explain what their needs are to someone else, and this is because how are you supposed to say what you need when you don't even know what exists? It would be nice if you had a menu [laughing]. So that makes it really difficult. But I think what people need to keep in mind is that if you call some place and you just say, "hey, I need help, and I have a disability" or "I need services," it isn't really easy for someone to direct you. It's impossible to tell someone will every single thing that exists. I think one tip for addressing that is to think ahead of time about what the barriers you're experiencing are, what the gaps are, what you're having trouble with specifically, and approach it that way. From there it's easier for a third party listening to you to connect you to things that match what your needs are. So, using these examples, a person who needs a personal care at attendant might say, "I have various disabilities, and I can't shower or dress independently." A person needing affordable housing would say, "I have low income and I need affordable housing." Also, it's important to keep in mind where you are in the process and what you've done so far. We'll get to that later. Now for the other category. How do we tell if an issue or problem is disability-related? And I think I gave you definition before, being treated differently based on having a disability or denied access or denied an accommodation of some kind. So we have two examples here. One is a grocery store refusing to assist a person with a visual impairment in locating an item. This is a disability-related issue. The person needs some kind of accommodation in order to use the services of the grocery store to shop. In the second example, there's a person with a disability who, with a physical disability, who needs to make adaptations to their home to make it more accessible. Now, if that person's contractor doesn't follow through with what they've agreed upon, and steals their money, it is not a disability issue simply because the person has a disability and the contracting work had to do with their disability. It's still a consumer issue, possibly a theft or a crime, but not a disability issue. So, that's that. We are moving onto the next step. Now we're thinking about goals and priorities, and identifying goals and priorities is another important step, because it's really relevant to the plan of action that you're going to take. It allows you to focus on the most pressing aspects of your issues, and set priorities if you have more than one issue, and figure out what's most important to deal with first. So, when you have an issue and you're seeking assistance with it, you want to think about the goals that you have for addressing it. And I think one thing that isn't on this list is that your goal might be to just acquire a certain service. So that's one. You might want to resume a service or benefit or support that's stopped, get an accommodation, report bad behavior, etc. Now, so we have -- I'm sorry, let's see -- apologies. So you may have more than one goal in any given time. Let's say, for example, your service stopped, some service that you're having. Your goal obviously would be to resume that service, but you also might want to report the bad behavior of the person that you dealt with. Now, those are two different goals. They might be addressed with different places, but you might have priorities. Of course, you're going to want to get the service back; but maybe you're not going to want to report the bad behavior until you do that. Just want to recognize that you can have more than one goal for an issue; that it might be handled by another party. I mean, you might have to go to different places to address the different goals. Okay. Sorry. Okay. So keeping in mind what we discussed so far, we're going to be taking that information into a few examples, and then talk about analyzing them from these perspectives. So we have robin, who has a psychiatric disability, is homeless and can't afford housing because the source of income is SSI, and they're also having a problem with their SNAP benefits. So I'm going to fill all of these, and kind of analyze what we talked about so far. The context and the issue here, we're talking about housing issue and a benefit issue. The housing issue is a housing search. Person needs affordable housing, and the benefit issue is SNAP. SNAP benefits used to be called food stamps. Is this a disability-related issue? No, it isn't. Housing search is a search for affordable housing, which anyone would have, not disability-related. SNAP benefits are not just for people with disabilities. Presumably, robin's goal would be to find housing, to get SNAP benefits restored. And in terms of priorities, probably finding immediate emergency housing might be a first goal while the second goal would be to get immediately working on the SNAP and the housing search. Which are all very important, probably pressing needs as well. Next, we have Bailey, has spina bifida, frequent migraines and lives in a large complex. The unit has bugs and management not taking action to address it despite requests. Bailey is stressed about it. Causing them to have more frequent migraines. Meanwhile Bailey asked to move to another building two years ago because the laundryroom is more physically accessible. Bailey called the Board of Health a report about big infestation and the landlord got angry and asked them to move out in 30 days. This is a housing issue, but two separate subcategories of housing. We have a tenant's rights -- two tenant's rights issues, health and sanitation, the bugs, and the eviction threat. Those are tenants' rights issue, not disability related. Still important issue, but they might be addressed with agencies that deal with those sorts of issues. The transfer request from two years ago is disability-related. It was essentially a request for reasonable accommodation. So what are Bailey's goals and priorities? We don't really know, but we're going to make guesses here. Surely, the eviction needs to be addressed immediately. They need to secure someone as soon as possible to help with that. I would say the bugs are a priority as well, trying to deal with that issue. As far as the reasonable accommodation request, it seems like it was ignored, but it is unlikely that a landlord is going to entertain transferring you to another unit when they're trying to evict you. So if, when this eviction issue is resolved and Bailey still wants to live there and is going to live there, that would be the more appropriate time to address the reasonable accommodation issue. It probably wouldn't be a priority, because it would just be ignored. Now getting to our last example. We have Jordan who has neuropathy in their feet and works as a cashier in a large retail stores. When standing for a long period of time their feet become numb and painful. At lunch, Jordan told the super visedder they wanted to bring a chair to the register, the supervisor said they don't do that. Jordan also reports they don't think they were paid properly for certain hours that they recently worked. Jordan is very up set and not sure they want to work there. So let's fill in these again. We have employment issues. Subcategories is one is related to reasonable accommodation; requesting that you be permitted to have the chair as an accommodation. The other issue is also important. It's a wage dispute. But that's not a disability-related issue, and that would be addressed with agencies that deal with the wage an hour rules. So, the goals here are to address both issues presumably, but Jordan said in the description, Jordan is not sure they want to work there. If Jordan doesn't want to work there anymore there's no reason to pursue the reasonable accommodation issue. If they do want to work there, that's probably a priority. The wage issue is probably a priority issue as well. But as you see, these issues would be addressed in different places. Okay. Our next step is to prepare, gather, research. And this is really a final stage step to take in analyzing our issue before we figure out who we're going to contact and what we're gonna say to people. So what are we trying to do here in this step? We want to be organized. We want to get clear on the facts and what information we need to see so we can make good use of our time with any experts that we find as we move forward. So, I think I've mentioned before, or at the beginning in the pitfalls, that what you've done so far is really always going to be relevant, because it might mean you're going to discuss a different angle, you're going to deal with a different -- you're going to pursue something in a different way based on what you've done so far. So, let's just -- and this allows you to have a really productive conversation rather than repeating something that already happened. So let's just use our examples. So robin, for example, would want to tell anyone, you know, calling around that they're speaking to, what they already know about finding housing. And what they've done so far. And the reason those details are important is because otherwise robin might call 10 places, and they're all gonna tell you the same details about subsidized housing, how to apply for it, how hard is it to get? If we're talking about Jordan, Jordan should be prepared to mention to someone that they only had a casual conversation with a supervisor about needing the chair. Those details are important. If Jordan had already, you know, been officially denied we might have a different thing to talk about if Jordan calls us at Massachusetts Office on Disabiity. The other question is: What research can you do yourself to learn about your issue? And what records that you have. Robin, for example, may want to review SNAP rules and look at any to see if they have any correspondence from Department of transitional assistance -- that's the state agency that administers the SNAP program. If robin had paper work that explained why DTA was stopping the benefits, that would be really important to share with someone. Bailey would probably want to look on themselves around rules around ea Vicktion, if possible, if they're capable of doing that, and Bailey should be prepared to retrieve the letter they got to see what it says. Because whoever they're speaking to, if they're saying they're going to be evicted and they got a letter, they're going to want to know what the letter says. Is it actually an eviction notice or a letter? That's important. Does Jordan have an employee handbook that talks about requesting accommodation? We're pretty sure Jordan hasn't done anything other than have a verbal conversation so there probably isn't any written exchanges about needing an accommodation. So, finally, and this is really important note, and you would be surprised but try to familiarize yourself with the proper names of agencies, providers that you're having difficulty with, and the names of programs. Saying, "I spoke to the disability office," for example, doesn't tell you really who you spoke to, and really the goal is to try to, if you're trying to reach out for help from someone else, they're going to want to know what the names of the places are. If you aren't sure of the proper names, part of prep paring for this is to kind of look up this stuff, so when you have a conversation you can be productive. You know, you might want to look and see if you have any letterhead that says what people do. So, kinds of other things to think about: What can I do for myself before I call people? What can I research? Laws, policies, regulations that I can refer to. And then from there, do I know of any organizations that I think might be appropriate? If I can't answer those questions about why someone's denied me a service of some kind, if it's possible to ask it might be helpful. A lot of times people say, um, they just stopped and they haven't said why. You know, usually there's a reason that someone, something stopped, or someone denied something. You may not agree with the reason, but there is a reason, so it would be helpful to know what that is. Figure out, before you contact people, what information you need from them. And if you have particular questions, write them down. You might have done all the research you can, and that's what we would hope you do, and then the remaining things are the questions you have and you're going to ask other people about them. Okay. So now we are going to talk about finding the relevant contact. And it can be really difficult and frustrating, particular when you have personal and sensitive issues, to be in a maze of someone gives you a list of 20 places and they don't even know what the places do, but they're trying to get you off the phone so they gave you a list, and you're running through that list, and you're frustrated. You don't want to be in a loop of explaining your issue over and over again to people who can't help to leave messages that no one answers, or to pursue avenues that just aren't effective at all. It's really tricky, and I'm not going to be able to put people in a great position to find the right place for everything here, but these are just some tips. So I want to talk a little bit about the structure of government and other organizations that might help direct you or provide services. Really government isn't one place. I think people think that it is, but government is made up of a lot of different agencies, and each of them has a different role. I know that's somewhat repetitive, but it's an important point. We have federal government, state government, local government, which is city and town government. City and towns have different departments that deal with different subject areas. Federal and state government has, you know, we're talking hundreds of agencies, each with different focus. In some cases, agencies are focused on a particular demographic, like we talked about the DTA that offers SNAP benefits. They have a lot of benefits that are available to people of very low income and assets. We have, you know, other agencies that might provide a service to a particular demographic of people with disabilities. We have agencies that are focused on housing, or employment related things. And then we have enforcement agencies and oversight agencies, agencies that license other agencies or administer benefits. So, yes, it is pretty tricky. I think we all know, and that's why we're here, there's no one-stop assistance to people with disabilities. If there were, that would be simple. Just to offer one example, if robin and Bailey, examples 1 and 2 that I discussed, if those folks were blind, they wouldn't contact Mass. commission for the blind just because they're blind. Mass. commission for the blind offers specific services, and robin and Bailey need to seek out services that have to do with housing search, tenants' rights issues, that sort of thing. So that is another important point. And non-profit agencies are also a resource. A lot of non-profit agencies are service providers. Some of them are contracted with government agencies to provide services, some just provide information, some deal with legislative advocacy. I think the important pieces, when you're trying to locate who to contact, if you can look at their website, if you have Internet access, do so, and figure out who you're talking to and what they're doing. It really does save time. So, I think if you're trying to find a relevant contact to find ar service -- we're going to talk about locating a service or a resource first -- remember what we spoke about earlier, you know, what's the subject area? Do I need to reach out to an agency with a disability focus? We have some resources here. Mass..gov detects you to all the state agencies. It is a good place to start, because you can do a word search and it will come up with agencies and organizations, and you can read from there. We also have some phone numbers on here for people who don't have Internet access. Citizens guide to state services is out of the office of secretary of state. Mass. options specifically connects people with disabilities and seniors to services and supports, so they're a good resource. Finally, centers for independent living. We always like to plug them. One of therefore five core services is information and referral, and they're really good at connecting people and explaining what services exist to match a need that they have. Now we are going to talk about how to find someone to address a barrier or a problem, particularly a problem with a third party. And before even getting to that, I just want to throw out there that there are different ways to resolve an issue. You can do something formal, formal complaints, legal procedures or administrative complaints. We have -- there are some grievance procedures that are available when dealing with state agencies, cities, towns and some large organizations. Then we have the informal problem resolution process, which is really just trying to get the entity that you're dealing with to work with you to resolve the issue you're having. So at MOD, we are always going to recommend to people that you try to resolve an issue as informally as possible. Try to resolve it first. Even if you think you've exhausted all your options, think about it some more. And we say this, because the formal complaint process really can take a long time. It involves a lot of effort and time. So it makes sense, first, to consider whether the entity that you're dealing with truly understands what you're asking about, and did they make a decision knowing all the facts? So for example, we spoke about Jordan who mentioned to the supervisor in casual conversation that they wanted a chair, and the supervisor said no. Do we think Jordan is ready for a complaint? Do we think Jordan is actually at an impasse with their employer? No, definitely not. Jordan hasn't yet explained that there's a disability-related need for the chair as far as we can tell. Jordan hasn't explained this is a reasonable accommodation request. If you work for a big retail store, there's definitely going to be an HR department, a human resources department, that makes these types of decisions. Supervisors don't likely make these decisions. So Jordan, looks to me, hasn't found the right person to deal with, and a good idea would be to try to resolve this one more time with the company. To put the request in writing, to explain the connection between the neuropathy symptoms and the kneed for a chair, and putting this in writing is helpful. And if this doesn't work out and in the end the employer says no, Jordan is in a much better place to file a complaint using this paper trail of paperwork that they've already used. So clarifying misunderstandings and it's always possible to go ahead and file a complaint if things don't work out. I want to make sure that I mention there's a second tier of resolving issues a little bit less formally than filing a complaint or grievance, and that's reaching out to someone above. Is there higher level management maybe with a service provider with an issue you're having? Is there an oversight agency? Does someone -- is there a corporate office? Does someone license this agency? Or are they funding them? So there are other options. If you are going to file a formal complaint somewhere, I guess we're talking about disability-related issues on this slide, it's definitely an option where a law or regulation hasn't been followed. People should know that when you file a complaint with an enforcement agency, they are neutral. They're not your advocate. They don't call up the place you're having a problem with and tell them to stop it. They're investing the issue. Both sides of the issue. And there's procedures involves, and timelines to follow, and things you have to answer. So it's a lot of work, and that's another reason we recommend you try to resolve things informally first. These processes are often very long and they don't resolve issues in realtime. It's an after-the-fact sort of resolution. And also, some agencies may not investigate every complaint they receive, so that would be something you'd ask if you were to file a complaint. We have some examples of enforcement agencies at the bottom. Now let's talk about some tips for communicating effectively with these folks that you're gonna call to ask questions after you've done all your analysis and preparation. You want to make a concise, brief intro explanation. Start with a few sentences clarifying your issue, and what you're asking this place that you're talking to to do. What is it you're seeking from them? Of course, explain where you are in the process so far of addressing your issue, what you have done so far, who you have contacted so far. Be clear about the names, the proper names of places you've spoken to, and proper names of benefits, programs, services. And again, along the lines of it's important where you're at in the process, or that will depend on how you take your next step. If you know the reason that you're having this problem, like this third party has said why they're denying you a service, why they're not offering you something anymore, tell that to the person you're speaking to. And then tell them why you disagree with them, why you think that they're wrong and their decision is wrong. Allow people to ask you questions. You might have taken a lot of work to prepare what you're going to say, but the people you're talking to know what facts they need to know and you may have an opportunity to provide more information later, but you don't want to launch into a very long explanation and not be interrupted only to find out in the end that you're not in the right place. So in inquire early about whether you have contacted the right place, and what exactly someone can do for you under the circumstances. Don't say everything up front. Ask for what people need. I've said that. This is another thing that comes up often. Don't forward like a very detailed information up ahead before you've spoken to an agency. I know at Massachusetts Office on Disabiity, sometimes we get these very comprehensive packages of information that took someone a long time to put them together, a lot of work and organization involved, and they've spent a lot of money to send it overnight and we're not the right place. So you want to check before you send something, and keep in mind that if you forward people email chains of correspondence without any context, people aren't going to be able to decipher what your issue is or what you want out of contacting them. Have the proper expectations. I know we've talked about the different agencies do different things. And so it will be much easier for you if you figure out what people do ahead of time and know the difference so that you aren't in a place where you've spent a lot of time and energy explaining something to someone. This is another important point. Sorry, I don't know that these are all in a particular order, but if you have communication needs that are disability-related, reference them at the beginning so that you can ensure that there's effective communication going forward with whomever you're engaging with. Keep records of who you have spoken to, what they told you, the name of the place, the date, and if you're supposed to do something as a next step, keep track of that as well as whether someone agreed to do something for you. And of course, be aware of deadlines. I'm sorry that there's a lot of content in here to fit the time, so I apologize if things have gone quickly. You can certainly contact MOD as a resource for any of these issues. We can help you understand your rights and obligations under disability rights laws. We offer support in drafting reasonable accommodation requests and how to navigate pitfalls. We can discuss informal resolution options and help you identify who and where you can, to whom you can file formal complaints complaints. I am going to turn off my share and see if people have questions. Oh, I would also say we have a website we're consistently building. You know, please keep track of our guidance documents and things like that. >> Lilia: Thank you, Naomi, complnlt. We do have some questions that came in. We also have Camille from MOD's disability rights unit is in the Q & A answering some of your questions also. >> NAOMI: Thanks Camille! >> Lilia: Thank you, Camille. First question, you mentioned advocates at one point. I do have calls from people asking for an advocate. Can you explain briefly what an advocate is? What that means? >> NAOMI: I kind of can't. [laughing]. So, you know, an advocate -- there isn't a job description. If I were to say what a job description of an advocate is. It's going to depend on where you work, right? That's why it's very difficult to find an advocate. for someone, because number one, you don't know what it is they're actually asking for. But this is a title that many people have in different jobs. So I know that there are some advocates who work in sort of multi service organizations. They are sort of a support person you can talk to to iron out different issues that you have. If you have sort of a case management kind of model. And, you know, so maybe they're providing support and advocacy to people in their case load and population, but they may not have subject matter expertise in these issues. Like if you had a discrimination issue, are they going to be able to help you with it? Now, there are some agencies that have let's say a housing advocate. And maybe that person's role in their agency as an advocate is just to help people find housing. I know that some legal service agencies have advocates that do some like legal advocacy. So there isn't one advocate, you know, I can't really say, oh, an advocate does this. So when you're asking for an advocate, it probably doesn't explain what you're looking for. Maybe an advocate, some advocates might sit with you in a meeting and offer support. But that might not be your need. So I wouldn't focus on the title of the profession but rather what it is you're seeking. I hope that answers it. >> Thank you. We've also got a couple people with hands raised. So I'm going to allow you to turn on your microphone, Veronique, and your video, so you can ask your question. Are you there? >> NAOMI: While you're connecting, on our last slide we have a link to our web form if anybody wants to ask questions there going forward. >> Lilia: I have put that in the chat as well. If anyone wants to discuss their issue in depth, or if we're not able to get to it, definitely call us or fill out our form there. Looks like Veronique has left, so I'll take her down. And Richard? We've got a Richard also with his hand raised. Going to allow you to turn your video and microphone on. Richard, are you there? Should be able to turn your mic and video on. All right. We've got another person. Cynthia. I'm going to turn your microphone and video on. >> Hi, good afternoon, everyone. >> NAOMI: Hi. >> I am a member of the commission on disability in my hometown. I'm also a former special ed advocate, so you are so right when there are so many other areas to go towards. My question simply is, because I've been taking pictures through my phone to gather all this information: Will there be a link that could be emailed to us so that I can go before my board and share this information with them? >> NAOMI: Do you mean the PowerPoint? >> Yeah, your presentation. Is there any way that can get emailed to us so we can have that? >> NAOMI: Of course. >> That would be phenomenal. I think these quarterly teas -- I kind of gigged at the "teas" are great information, so thank you all for attending and for presenting. It's very much appreciated. >> NAOMI: Thanks, Cynthia. >> Lilia: Thank you, I forgot to bring my tea with me today, but thank you for joining us. The slides and recording will be emailed out to all registrants, so that will be in your email. We also had a couple people ask, and Camille is great in the Q & A providing some information on this: Is finding accessible housing a disability issue? Where would you go for that? >> NAOMI: You know, housing is -- well, of course, if you need accessible housing, that is a disability-related issue. But and so, I don't want to get stuck on saying that it is or isn't a disability-related issue. I mean, the fact is that, you know, you could contact a disability-related agency and say: Do you have information on accessible housing? Sure. I think in the context of housing, I find that the housing agencies that specialize in housing search, like the regional non-profit agencies like the SMOCKs, CTIs, those kinds of folks, are really experts in housing, so you could go anywhere to get information on accessible housing, including the accessible housing registry, Mass.accesshousingregistry.org. So you're right. It is a disability issue, because you need accessible features. But housing itself is housing and, you know, I think it's fine to contact a disability-related agency. But the fact is, there aren't unique resources for affordable housing that are just for people with disabilities, right? You can really get information on how to apply for housing anywhere, whether or not you need accessible housing. I hope that helps. >> Lilia: Thank you, Naomi. I will try Richard one more time. I think we were having issues before. Richard, are you there? You should be able to turn on both your mic and your video. I'm going to move onto Eleanor. Eleanor, I am turning on your mic and video. >> Thank you very much. First of all, thank you for doing this. This is the first one I've participated in. I look forward to joining in others. My question is: What is MOD's policy on saying that alcoholism is a disability? And how would you address that? Mass. COD -- um, focuses on -- what would the commission do? >> NAOMI: I think in terms of an issue, if you're talking about, you know, our focus is on disability-related civil rights issues, and so I would say that, you know, a person who is in recovery has protections from discrimination and also, you know, is in a position to ask for accommodations. So, you know, I don't want people to get so involved in the -- I know I placed a lot of focus on whether something is disability-related or not, and you know, that was really for the purpose of just helping people navigate. (background noise). -- but yes, you have protections under laws if you are a person in recovery. >> I probably should have provided some more background information, if I may. This is an individual, law enforcement, on probation, not six months, was terminated for a variety of reasons, a variety of things happened, drunk driving, speagd, showing up to work intoxicated as an officer, was terminated, and they're saying he shouldn't have terminated him because he has a disability, etc., etc., and it was illegal, and now he wants the town commission on disability to take a stand and say, yes, it is a disability, he wants us to get involved in disability alcoholism and drug issues as a disability. >> NAOMI: Well, I mean, these issues are kind of nuanced. So if I say that you have some protections, you know, that doesn't mean that what the employer did was wrong. I mean, you can't be intoxicated at work. So, I mean, these are nuanced issues, and we can have a side conversation because I know we're running out of time and I would have some questions about it. But, you know, I would say in general that as the commission, you know, your role is to -- is kind of limited, right? You're there to offer some consultation and direction on how your municipality handles disability issues. Even if you wanted to offer an opinion as to whether you thought something, you know, an employment issue went in a particular way, you know, I don't think a commission would have much of a role in addressing a termination. But I'm happy to talk to you about it off line if you want, because I'm not sure that I have enough details to kind of just analyze it generally. But, no, you can contact me or you can contact the agency, I'll call you back. I don't know maybe someone who's on here can give you my contact information while I'm talking, because I can't do two things at once. [laughing]. >> I just called 617 phone number and ask for you? >> NAOMI: Yes, leave a message, and I'll call you back. >> Thank you, Naomi. >> NAOMI: Sure. >> Lilia: Thank you. I will put that in the chat as well. Our next question is: If you have a disability and live with a family who does not, can you still get help for housing or other services related to a disability? >> NAOMI: I mean, every program and service is different. So I guess if you're saying you live in housing and you live with family, and you don't want to live there anymore, are you eligible to apply for housing? You would look at, you know, if you -- I mean, everything sort of depends. Would you be eligible for services on your own to find housing? Sure. I'm not sure I understand the question, but, Lilia, maybe you can clarify. >> We also have another question also along the lines of what they were trying to ask. Which parts of this can a family member or friend do and which need to be done by the person with the disability. I think, um, someone was also asking like if you have a disability and you need a reasonable accommodation in housing, do you have to be the person requesting that? Or can someone else request it on your behalf? >> NAOMI: No. Someone can do it on your behalf if you're not capable of doing it. But I think more importantly, whoever is making the request needs to be able to explain the connection between your disability-related symptoms or issues and what it is you're requesting. It shouldn't necessarily be your doctor. It should be you or someone assisting you. But whenever anyone is assisting you, whether it's with housing or a disability issue, anyone can call anywhere and ask a question. The difficulty comes in when the person who's trying to call for someone else doesn't have all the details. Then you're getting a little bit inefficient, because you're saying, "well, Charlie told me that they said this or that" and you don't have the details. It's not as helpful. But I think anyone can call a place and ask questions to anyone. For reasonable accommodations in housing, I'm going to plug one of our publications that we put out on our website. Maybe Lilia can put it in the chat. It's about housing, you know, how to properly request reasonable accommodation in the housing setting. I think that would be much more valuable to read if you're trying to figure out -- I think it's less about whether someone is saying things for you versus are they putting the right information in the request? And I think that's really where people run into difficulty is they don't provide sufficient information about the connection between their disability and the request that they're making. So that might be a nice tool. There we go. >> Lilia: Just one more follow up on that, and then we're at time. Just to clarify, would living with somebody else who does not have a disability, would that make you no longer eligible for any kind of reasonable accommodation or disability-related accommodation? >> NAOMI: You would have to be specific. Every accommodation request is different. So I mean, maybe you're referring to something where you're asking someone to do something and another place is saying you have someone to do it. Really, it's impossible for me to answer this question without more detail, or to answer it accurately. So I'm happy to answer it. It's just I would need more detail and you can certainly put your request in and I will answer it, you know, give it some actual attention rather than -- every reasonable accommodation is case-by-case. That you should know. So everything depends. >> Lilia: All right. Thank you. So we are over time. You will have a link to a survey pop up on your screen when you log out. Please fill out that survey. It will help us with planning and improving on our future quarterly teas. We also have several other trainings and events coming up, so check out our events page. I put a link to that in the chat. And the slides, a recording and all of these links and resources I've shared will be emailed to all registrants next week so keep an eye out for that. Thank you everyone for joining us. Thank you Naomi, thank you to our interpreters and CART. >> NAOMI: Thank you, interpreters and CART. Bye.